CM for investment in human welfare

By Our Staff Correspondent

QUETTA: Balochistan Chief Minister Mir Sarfraz Bugti on Wednesday emphasised that sustained investment in human development was the only guarantee of a prosperous and stable future for the province.

The chief minister expressed these views during a meeting with a delegation of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), led by Country Representative Luay Shabaneh, in Quetta.

Discussions focused on key population-related challenges facing Balochistan, including maternal and child health, youth and women's welfare, and the promotion of data-driven policymaking.

The meeting was attended by Parliamentary Secretary for Population Agha Umar Khan Ahmedzai, Chief Secretary Shakeel Qadir Khan, Population Secretary Zafar Khan Baloch, Principal Secretary to the Chief Minister Babar Khan, and UNFPA Quetta Office chief Saadia Ata.

Both sides agreed to establish a coordinated provincial task force on population issues.

The task force will ensure interdepartmental coordination and oversee the implementation of policies related to population management, health, and education.

CM Bugti stressed that policymaking must be aligned with modern requirements through advocacy and a robust data governance framework, ensuring that all decisions were based on credible evidence.

He reiterated that education and health remain top priorities of the provincial government, noting that sustainable development could not be achieved without meaningful progress in these sectors.

The chief minister highlighted that institutional reforms were essential to improving maternal and child health indicators.

He added that the welfare of youth and women must be treated as the cornerstone of Balochistan's social and economic development.

"Investment in human development is the true guarantee of Balochistan's bright future," he said.

UNFPA Country Representative Shabaneh praised the Balochistan government's policy priorities and reform initiatives.

He reaffirmed UNFPA's commitment to strengthening support for population, health, and human development projects in the province, assuring continued close collaboration to achieve shared development goals.

Balochistan sees major progress in polio fight

Environmental samples show 87pc drop in poliovirus; no polio case reported in Balochistan in 2025

By Saleem Shahid

QUETTA: Balochistan has recorded a significant breakthrough in its fight against polio, with new environmental surveillance data released in December showing a sharp decline in poliovirus circulation compared to last year — a development health officials are calling a major step toward eradication.

The data from December 2025 indicates a major improvement, showing an 87 percentage-point reduction in positive environmental samples compared to December 2024.

While 95.7 per cent of sites — 22 of 23 — tested positive in December 2024, only 8.7pc — or 2 of 23 — samples tested positive in December 2025.

No evidence of local virus transmission has been found in Balochistan in either environmental sample, according to the report. Authorities traced all detected viruses to importation from outside the province.

Encouragingly, no polio case has been reported in Balochistan in 2025. This contrasts with roughly 27 cases documented in the province in 2024. Yet the virus is still active in other regions, with 31 polio cases reported across Pakistan's provinces in 2025.

A PUPPET show was organised in Quetta during an anti-polio campaign to raise awareness about the importance of polio drops and vaccination.—Dawn

Health authorities credited the progress to six polio vaccination campaigns and two fractional Inactivated Poliovirus Vaccine (fIPV), campaigns conducted across the province this year.

Inam-ul-Haque, the coordinator for the Emergency Operations Centre Balochistan, said the results reflect "sustained quality campaigns and strong community engagement".

"This improvement is the result of quality vaccination campaigns and proper monitoring at every level," Inam said. "We have also conducted awareness initiatives such as the Immunity Express and puppet shows across Balochistan to educate communities about the importance of polio vaccination."

The coordinator paid tribute to frontline workers, calling them the backbone of the programme.

"Our frontline workers have done exceptional work — in snow, floods, and extreme heat," Inam-ul-Haque said. "Without their dedication and commitment, we could not achieve these results in Balochistan."

However, he cautioned that the fight is not over.

"The virus is still active in Pakistan, and this remains a serious threat," he said. "Continued vigilance is essential."

The coordinator stressed religious leaders' role in community involvement, citing the ulema and scholars' importance in spreading polio vaccination awareness.

According to health officials, the recent progress proves polio eradication in Balochistan is possible.

Students, pilgrims among Pakistanis returning from Iran

By Behram Baloch & Saleem Shahid

GWADAR / QUETTA: Pakistanis, including students, pilgrims and businessmen, continue to return from Iran through the Gabd-Rimdan crossing on the Pak-Iran border in Gwadar district, officials said on Wednesday.

A senior official posted at the border said that 380 Pakistanis from different provinces of Iran had returned over the past four days.

He added that 44 more Pakistanis crossed into Pakistan on Wednesday through the Gabd point, including 11 students of Iran's Al-Mustafa University and 33 pilgrims, including women and children, who had travelled to Iran for pilgrimage.

Officials said the number of returning students, including female students, had so far reached around 150, while 235 pilgrims from various parts of Sindh and Punjab had also entered Pakistan via the Gabd-Rimdan crossing.

"All the returning Pakistanis proceeded to their respective cities via Gwadar," an official said, adding that the Gwadar administration provided security during their onward journeys.

On Tuesday, 51 male and female students reached Gwadar late in the evening and, after an overnight stay, departed for their hometowns under tight security aboard passenger coaches. The students were enrolled at Zanjan University of Medical Sciences.

Pilgrims returning from Iran said many more students, businessmen and pilgrims were on their way back to Pakistan amid reports of violent protests in several parts of Iran.

"A large number of Pakistanis are still returning as the situation remains tense in many areas," said Asad Ali, a pilgrim who arrived on Wednesday with his family.

Rainwater harvesting systems look 'promising'

Initiatives aim to capture rainwater for institutional, horticultural use

By Our Staff Correspondent

QUETTA: Rainwater harvesting and groundwater recharge systems installed at two major educational institutions in Quetta have shown promising results amid one of Balochistan's worst droughts in recent years, officials said.

The province received nearly 52 per cent less rain than average in 2025, according to the Pakistan Meteorological Department, intensifying pressure on groundwater resources that meet most of the provincial capital's water needs.

In response to the growing water crisis, the International Water Management Institute (IWMI), under the European Union-funded Revival of Balochistan Water Resources Programme (RBWRP), installed rainwater harvesting and recharge infrastructure at the Balochistan University of Information Technology, Engineering and Management Sciences (BUITEMS) and the Balochistan Agriculture College (BAC).

The systems were tested during rains in December 2025. On December 20, Quetta received about 5 millimetres of rain, allowing storage tanks at BUITEMS to fill close to capacity without triggering groundwater recharge.

A heavier rainfall of 13mm on Dec 30-31 fully filled the storage tanks and initiated the recharge process. Monitoring data showed that four cubic metres of water were recharged into the groundwater aquifer.

Water quality tests recorded Total Dissolved Solids (TDS) at 155 parts per million, meeting standards for safe recharge.

At the Balochistan Agriculture College, rains during the same period filled a 286,500-litre storage pond, while overflow contributed around 1.5 cubic metres to groundwater recharge, highlighting the benefits of larger storage systems.

Apart from rain water the site at BUITEMS also utilises the overhead tank overflow for storage which is regularly used for horticultural purpose.

The IWMI's Deputy Country Representative Dr Muhammad Arshad, project officials Shamsher Shah and Mueez Shehzad said the initiatives aim to capture rainwater for institutional and horticultural use while replenishing depleted aquifers, offering a sustainable approach to water management in arid regions.

They said that the December rains confirmed the operational effectiveness of the systems, which could be replicated across other drought-prone areas of Balochistan.

Several nations eying JF-17 jets, says PM

Continued from Page 1

Defence Production Minister Raza Hayat Harraj said China was on board with the sale of these aircraft. Mr Harraj told *BBC Urdu* that the jets were battle-tested during the four-day conflict with India last year. "The entire world's air forces saw these jets' performance during that time and praised it."

The minister termed the price of the jet "an important" aspect, saying it was valued at "$40-50m; this depends on the jet's features, and the price can also be higher than this". According to the minister, "some portion of the jet is readied in Pakistan, and some portion is readied in China".

Einar Tangen, a senior fellow at China's Centre for International Governance Innovation (CIGI), told *BBC Urdu* that "technology" involved in the jet was likely controlled by China. Therefore, any sale pact would be a joint agreement, with Beijing being a "senior partner".

Balochistan uplift projects

During the cabinet meeting, PM Shehbaz shared the details of projects announced by the federal government in Balochistan, particularly the N-25 Karachi-Chaman highway.

He said the work on the project had formally begun and would be completed within a year instead of the originally planned two years. He said he recently visited Quetta, where the foundation stone of the nearly 850-kilometre highway was laid.

He said the Ministry of Communications had proposed a two-year completion timeline, but he had directed that the project be finished within one year. "The project will cost approximately Rs400 billion, to be fully financed by the federal government," he said. It may be noted that the government is charging a special levy on petroleum projects to finance this project.

Furthermore, the PM revealed that a Rs75 billion agricultural package for farmers had been completed. "Of this amount, Rs50 billion was provided by the federal government. The package successfully addressed the long-standing issue of electricity theft in the province. Through the installation of solar panels, farmers are now able to irrigate their lands independently, ensuring sustainable agricultural activity," he said.

The prime minister also announced significant progress regarding the establishment of Daanish schools in the province. "Five Daanish schools are already planned, while two additional schools have been announced during his visit, bringing the total to seven," he added. He expressed confidence that all seven schools would be completed by the end of this year.

Civil service reforms

In a separate meeting, PM Shehbaz sought comprehensive and effective recommendations to evaluate the performance of federal secretaries, emphasising that recognition of officers' good performance was essential for the overall improvement of the civil services.

He instructed the relevant committee to finalise comprehensive reform recommendations for the national civil service at the earliest. The prime minister directed that meaningful consultations be held with stakeholders as part of the proposed civil service reforms.

The cabinet was also informed about new bills, stating that newly designed currency notes of Rs100, Rs500, Rs1000, and Rs5,000 would be issued soon.

PM-Qatari emir phone call

Meanwhile, PM Shehbaz received a telephone call from Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani, the emir of the State of Qatar, and discussed the regional situation against the backdrop of unrest in Iran and threats of a US attack. According to the statement, the PM appreciated Qatar's constructive and proactive role in promoting peace, dialogue, and mediation across the region, and acknowledged its meaningful efforts to defuse tensions through diplomatic solutions.

Man gunned down by robbers in Gwadar

By Our Correspondent

GWADAR: Robbers gunned down a man at a shop here on Wednesday.

Police said that two unidentified robbers, with their faces concealed, entered a shop on Airport Road, held the customers at gunpoint, and began looting their valuables.

However, the shopkeeper and some customers resisted. In response, the robbers opened fire, killing one of the customers.

The robbers then looted cash and mobile phones before fleeing the scene. Police arrived after receiving information about the incident and transferred the body to the district hospital. The deceased was identified as Sameer Elahi Bakhsh.

The police said they were conducting raids to arrest the robbers and further investigation is underway.

Aurangzeb urges MNCs to update models

Continued from Page 1

the past 18 months.

On the government's privatisation drive, the minister said 24 state-owned enterprises (SOEs) had been handed over to the Privatisation Commission, arguing that losses from SOEs created a "huge gap" in public finances.

He said the government had shut down the Utility Stores Corporation and the Pakistan Agricultural Storage and Services Corporation (Passco) primarily because of the subsidy burden. "More importantly, it was the corruption built into those subsidies that was the real cost to the exchequer," he added.

Referring to digitisation efforts, Mr Aurangzeb said all government payments would be routed through digital channels by June.

On tariff reforms, he said regulatory duty (RD), customs duty (CD) and additional customs duty (ACD) would be phased out over five years to reduce input costs and support an export-led growth strategy.

He said such reforms were being pursued for the first time and could mark Pakistan's "East Asia moment".

He said prolonged protection for industry had reduced competition. "If we are to take this forward and move towards export orientation, we have to start from somewhere," he added.

Mr Aurangzeb described debt servicing as the country's "single largest expense item" and said the government planned to modernise the debt management office with improved investor relations and operational capacity.

"We saved roughly Rs850 billion last year in terms of debt servicing," he said, expressing hope of achieving similar savings this year. He also said the government planned to issue Panda bonds "in the next couple of weeks if all goes well".

The minister reiterated the government's intent to bring crypto-related activity into a regulated framework, citing "billions of dollars" in trading volumes.

In October 2025, Procter & Gamble said it would wind down manufacturing and commercial activities in Pakistan and rely on third-party distributors to serve customers.

Yamaha Motor Pakistan Ltd announced in September last year that it was discontinuing motorcycle assembly operations as part of a change in business strategy.

Careem also suspended ride-hailing operations in Pakistan after nearly a decade.

Analysts say such exits and scale-backs can reflect a range of factors, including corporate restructuring, increased competition and the operating environment.

Opposition demands joint sitting on Iran situation

Continued from Page 1

neighbouring country, Iran, while the western media was creating an environment that could be used as a pretext to undermine Iran's sovereignty.

The TTAP proposed that in view of the seriousness of the potential crisis and its possible impact on the region, the government should also convene a meeting of neighbouring countries to develop a joint and coordinated strategy to address these challenges.

PTI slams action against Adiala protesters

Meanwhile, the PTI denounced the use of force by the Rawalpindi police to disperse its sit-in outside Adiala jail on Tuesday night. The police, in a midnight operation, had used force to disperse the participants.

In a statement, the PTI said these actions constituted a grave assault on the Constitution, the rule of law and fundamental human rights, and reflected a systematic campaign of political victimisation designed to silence dissent. The party vowed that such conduct was unacceptable in any democratic society and would be vigorously challenged at every constitutional, legal and democratic forum.

The party claimed that family members of Imran Khan and party workers were present outside the jail to exercise their constitutional and legal right to meet their incarcerated leader, but the police suppressed this activity using force, intimidation and harassment.

"Peaceful party leaders and workers, along with Imran Khan's sisters, were subjected to baton charges, manhandling and abuse. As a result of this inhumane operation, 11 male party workers were detained at the Rawat police station, while three women—Zulekha, Dr Asma and Sanaiya Safeer—remained in the custody of Rawalpindi Police," it claimed. Similarly, the PTI stated that Advocate Raja Yasir, Adil, and Tanveer were also arrested.

Furthermore, the party stated that the Rawalpindi police established checkpoints near Bahria Town, where citizens returning from Adiala were subjected to searches, with mobile phones snatched, women's vehicles seized, and the windows of several cars smashed. The PTI alleged that the citizens were coerced into paying money to recover their mobile phones and vehicles from the police, while those who refused to pay bribes had their vehicles confiscated.

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